



CHURCHWORKER SHORTAGES SATISFACTIONS AND STRESSES:

A Collection of
"Pressure Points" columns
by
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and
other related articles
appearing in the Reporter



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PRESSURE POINTS ARTICLE APRIL 1999

Q: There seems to be a growing concern over the shortage of pastors and qualified teachers in our congregations and schools. Over the past 20 years, the Synod has been losing both due to death, retirement and—at an alarming rate—resignation from the ministry. It is this last category that raises some serious issues in terms of recruiting more young people.

I have written a number of letters through the years to various officials of my district at the Synod. A few have responded, but none has given any real answer to my questions. If there are no answers, why aren't there? If there are, why aren't we discussing them?

Because you work in ministerial health, could you please try to answer my questions?

*What are the main reasons that our men and women are leaving the ministry in such numbers, and what are the approximate percentages in each case?

*Are there patterns, which, when discovered, can be addressed by the Synod in convention, or at the district or congregational levels?

It seems to me these are issues we should be addressing with greater zeal than “recruiting, recruiting, recruiting.”

A: The easy task is to write about the numbers, which appeared in *Lutheran Life* in May 1998. Over the decade from 1987 to 1996, a larger number of LCMS pastors took a break from active ministry by going on “candidate status” (CRM) or by resigning from the ministry than the number that retired or died. The cumulative change (number of clergy who entered service vs. number of clergy who left service for any reason) over the same period was a loss of 1,226 pastors, or an average of 123 per year.

The figures for commissioned ministers are even more staggering. Twelve times more commissioned ministers took a break from active ministry or resigned than the number who retired or died. The cumulative change over the decade was a loss of 2,962 commissioned ministers, an average of 296 per year.

I agree with you that telling people to recruit without examining root causes only throws us all into more despair. It is the Law, actually, without any Gospel.

What we can do is to discuss as carefully as possible the causes of the loss of people to ministry, and then seek to address directly those causes. Your strategy offers hope, if the issues can be identified. Herein is our challenge: Can we speak forthrightly about such things?

This column is now open. Will readers join the conversation? I'll summarize what I hear and offer some thoughts of my own. And, we'll keep it going for as long as we're getting somewhere (my call and/or my editor's). If nobody writes, I'll report that too.

The question: How come people are leaving the holy ministry (pastors) and the commissioned ministry (primarily teachers) at greater rates than people are going into these professions, creating an ever-increasing shortage?

PRESSURE POINTS ARTICLE MAY 1999

Why are pastors leaving the holy ministry and teachers leaving the commissioned ministry at greater rates than people are going into these professions, thus creating an ever-increasing shortage?

A: This question from a reader is one I posed last month when I declared this column to be open to conversation about the issue. Clearly, the person who wrote the question has a finger on the rapid pulse of the church; for my incoming e-mail has been quite heavy and the question has generated what is by far the largest written response I have ever received.

The response has been so great, and so difficult to summarize in this column's brief space, that I am discussing other ways of handling the matter with the editor of the Reporter.

I have learned several things since the column was published:

First, a study has been commissioned by the Synod's Board for Higher Education in order to prepare a strategy that will lead to higher seminary enrollments and help reduce the number of pastors leaving the ministry. Through it, the BHE will likely learn much. Every bit of what it learns should be shared with the church at large.

Second, the Synod's Mission and Ministry Forum will be taking up questions related to compensation for church workers. This has been a long-standing concern and, frankly, one found quite often in responses that I have received. However, the strong consensus so far is that compensation is often not the single most-important factor in people leaving ministry, with the possible exception of male teachers. (More about compensation next month.)

Third, I have received letters that contain a significant amount of skepticism about an ongoing discussion of this issue. Most expressed frustration based on the fact (as they see it) that discussion on this theme has been around for quite some time, and little, if anything, is actually done about identifying and addressing root causes.

As one writer put it, "it seems odd that you would ask the question 'why are people leaving the...ministry?' This topic has been discussed for [all] the ...years that I have been in ministry without resolution as far as I know. One would have to have lived under a rock not to have been in on this conversation at least once in that amount of time."

Fourth, there is a general consensus that the focus on recruitment apart from looking at the longer term issues of retention is shallow at best, and dangerous at worst.

"To speak of recruiting without dealing with retention is like Tom Sawyer persuading the neighborhood kids to whitewash the fence for awhile. It doesn't take them too long to find out that it's not all it's cracked up to be and then leave."

Fifth, there is a reservoir of hope even in the midst of skepticism. People wrote often in this spirit:

“I pray that more is done so we do not lose those specially called professionals.”

Last, many specifically told me that I could quote from their letters as long as anything that could be traced to them was eliminated. Clearly, this is less than a safe topic. And, a number wondered if the conversation about what they perceive to be the real issues could even go on. As one reader said:

“I, too, wonder whether we can speak forthrightly about such things. Though very risky in the present climate, I nevertheless wish to join the conversation.”

To those who have courageously joined the conversation so far, I want to extend my gratitude and my respect. I hope we can use your observations constructively in the months to come. And I welcome anyone else to the conversation.

THE LCMS IS LOSING GOOD WORKERS. THE QUESTION IS WHY?

In April and May, Dr. Bruce Hartung, director of LCMS Health Ministries with the Synod's Board for Human Care Ministries, asked those who read Pressure Points, a column he writes for REPORTER, to offer their opinions as to why a greater number of people are leaving the church body's pastoral and teaching ministries than are entering into them, thereby creating an ever-increasing shortage of church workers. In all, more than 100 readers responded, mentioning the problem areas listed here.

Problems are not necessarily listed in terms of relative importance.

Hartung's comments are in regular type; readers' comments are in quotes.

Most church workers, when discussing why they have chosen to remain in rather than to leave their positions, have pointed to their call to ministry - a call that is Spirit-inspired, and often experienced at very deep emotional and spiritual levels. In their correspondence, readers often answer questions they themselves raise, such as:

Why be a teacher or director of Christian education?

"Because I can speak of Jesus whenever I can."

"I continue to see myself as serving our Lord Jesus Christ through the congregations that have called me. I continue to have that calling to be a servant - despite the immediate circumstances. That's probably what will keep me in full-time ministry."

"I am thinking about leaving teaching altogether rather than not being able to freely teach the Gospel. To not be able to have an altar, light a candle, sing the songs, read the Bible, enact the characters and the stories, display the bulletin boards, tell the children, 'Jesus loves you, ' 'Jesus is your Best Friend,' and to give hugs in His stead is painful and repugnant to me."

Why be a pastor?

"With all of the frustrations, God still is doing His work through us. His work of building up His kingdom by the simple and powerful message of Christ having died for my sins and having arisen from the dead. He is our Captain and our Victor. In Him we also are winners. We feebly struggle while the saints in the glory shine."

"I have all the love and respect that any man could possibly need or want. Better yet - the Lord is truly worshipped here and the Gospel message is being preached in truth with the result of additional people coming to feed on the truth."

Our church workers often have a vision of themselves and others in Lutheran schools and congregations as working together for the greater mission of the proclamation and enactment of the Gospel. This desire by those in the church vocations - that pastor and teacher should be "on the same page" and of one spirit with people in their congregations and schools - is deeply felt and directly linked to the amount of pressure felt.

The consensus of communications to me is that where people are broadly united in mission, there is a great deal of support for the worker; but where people have unresolved, festering or chronic conflicts related to their mission, their personalities or prior events in the life of the worker or the congregation, there is a sense of distress. It appears that most of the failures in the areas of recruiting and retaining church workers can be traced to the breakdown of the sense of being jointly committed to the mission of the local place, and the failure of structures (like the district and the Synod) to be supportive.

But, of course, “I don’t believe there is one definitive reason for our declining numbers. There are many factors in each situation.”

The following “voices” - people who have written in response to the Pressure Points columns - are voices of “conversation.” But, in that conversation can be heard pain, hope, anger and honesty. All of the statements made by people are reflections of ideas made in a number of letters. The tone of many of the items is, of course, critical. After all, the question asked was, “Why do people leave?” Perhaps similar questions such as, “Why do people stay?” and “What are the joys of ministry?” would also be appropriate.

There likely will be attempts to discount these voices. But, it is always in the voices of those pushed to the margins, of those distressed, of those who have walked through the valley that we can find the truths connected with an issue or concern.

Teachers

Respect

“Parents will no longer take the teacher’s word over the kids.”

“Many parents want to assess blame. Often I am the target. I want to work together to focus on identifying the problems with a student and finding a solution.”

Conflict

”Endless, malicious gossip and a failure to implement Matthew 18 in dealings with teacher, students, families and other staff....it was this that, in the end, caused me to throw in the towel.”

“As hard as it is to say this, the major personal issues that I and my friends in the teaching ministry have had is with pastors who don’t see us as part of the team and hardly ever give a respectful word of encouragement.”

“Official calls are not issued, contracts are ‘understood’ to protect congregations from the process of getting rid of a ‘called’ teacher who doesn’t work out. The ‘call’ has taken on the meaning of ‘called on contract,’ but the word ‘call’ is sometimes used to placate the candidate and make him/her feel better.”

Salary

“Budgets are balanced and building projects are carried out on the backs of the low salaries of church workers.”

“This should put the question to bed! Until congregations place a stronger emphasis on the ministry of the church by supporting it financially, church workers will continue to leave the profession to find some place that values their expertise.”

“Many of my friends and my own family qualify for food stamps and free lunches because our wages were so low. Of course, I did not become a Lutheran teacher to earn money, but neither did I become a Lutheran teacher to subsidize the church.”

“Plunder and false expectations are two of the root causes of our troubles. By ‘plunder,’ I mean the vast majority of our congregations who subsidize their general fund by impoverishing their teachers. Hundreds of congregations stalemate for about three months each year fighting over teachers’ salaries.”

“When I hear what our parochial school teachers are expected to live on, I am embarrassed to be part of this church body. Most of my friends who went to college with me and went into teaching are no longer serving. They simply found it necessary to take jobs outside the church in order to provide for their families.”

Parenthood

“I left the full-time ministry for motherhood. During my ministry, I came to the very strong conviction that the primary place of faith nurture is the home. Many of my female colleagues left for the same reason. Some think I am ‘wasting’ my education and gifts, but my senior pastor wisely said that I have chosen a higher calling. I don’t know if I will ever return to professional ministry.”

“I made a choice between my vocation as a father and husband and my vocation as a teacher. I found I could not do both because of the low salary and the high demands of what seemed like a 24-hour a day job. I opted for being a father and a husband and found another teaching position outside of the LCMS system.”

Culture

“Our society has diminished the stature and relevance of the church and those who serve there. So, our people come to church with a secular mind-set. Once in leadership roles, they function from what they know best: a secular world view and approach.”

“Society is becoming increasingly at odds with the ministries of Lutheran schools and churches. We, as church workers, are finding ourselves further and further out of the range of society’s norms. The church and its workers are coming under fire as this world in which we live moves itself further from God’s will.”

Pastors

Overall

“My first response to your request in the April REPORTER was, ‘Would it do any good to write?’ We have talked about clergy burnout and stress during my whole ministry. Then, I thought, ‘If everyone had that attitude, we’d never get anywhere. I think you have opened a can of worms.’”

“First of all, [I want to offer] a comment on one of your comments. You wrote: ‘Herein is our challenge: Can we speak forthrightly about such things?’ Why this comment? Is it not Scripturally mandated that we should share things with each other in love? I know why you ask this question. It is because in our church (LCMS), open communication is not welcomed. We are taught and many live by the premise that we must put on outside facades and not live in reality.”

“We can’t keep shooting ourselves in the foot and wondering why we are stumbling along. When the ministry in any form is once again viewed by all church members as an honorable and respected position which should be supported and dealt with fairly, then we will once again be able to speak to one another and speak the truth in love. That’s the beginning of healing.”

“There are hundreds of reasons why people leave the ministry early. The major ones that I hear are: One, some are hounded out (sometimes rightly, sometimes wrongly); two, some just don’t like it; three, some wives cannot take it. People don’t very often quit because of doctrine. They quit for other reasons.”

“The cause is complex. It’s the seminaries, pastors themselves, congregations and society.”

Attitudes

“Anyone who knows what is going on knows that they will be immediately labeled and never supported by the brothers.”

“One of my sons has lost a strong interest in the ministry in view of the present climate in the LCMS, and in view of the absence of support for me by LCMS leaders when I was under attack. Issuing a call for ministerial students on the one hand, and issuing ultimatums to pastors on the other, is a terrible incongruity. As you stated, ‘it is the Law, actually, without the Gospel.’”

“Many pastors are discouraged by district and synodical politics. There is a feeling of lack of support and trust for pastors by district and Synod.”

“We are the church’s expendable losses.”

“I was tired of internecine synodical politics, especially at convention time.”

“I assumed wrongly that the Synod would automatically stand by their pastor until it was proven or demonstrated that he was in error.”

“Could it be due [to the fact] that we have prided ourselves too much in building a billion-dollar mortgage company and a great corporate headquarters, [and are] enjoying fine resorts and conferences rather than using every available resource in building up people and making future investments in training leaders with usable skills in order to build up a mission organization?”

“Many pastors that I spoke with are out in their congregations (the real world) trying to do the things they vowed to do in their ordination, but are unable to follow some of the practices because the times have changed. many of them are finding alternative ways of dealing with the ‘now,’ which is putting them in the position of modifying traditional approaches and still holding to the true message of God and Christ-crucified. This puts them in an impossible position with the Synod.”

Society

“America is an unchurched society moving rapidly to a post-modern stance of no absolutes, self-fulfillment and me first, and a way of processing information that has moved from Christian (we don’t know, thus God reveals truth) to modern (we don’t know, but empirical science will find out) to post-modern (we can’t know from all this information, thus I’ll decide my own truth). Church professionals are just as [easily] misled as others into a post-modern world view of life and its value system.”

Workload

“Congregations expect pastors to be workaholics.”

“Being told in synodical and district literature, ‘never enough, never enough!’ - I wasn’t giving enough, I wasn’t bringing in enough prospects, my congregation wasn’t big enough.”

“A pastor’s wife expects Synod to be unsupportive of her husband.”

“My children complain to me that we are offering them up on the altar of service to the church rather than have time enough to be a parent.”

“This is the only position where you can work morning, noon and night and still not do enough because one more person has wanted your time without knowing what you have done the rest of the day.”

“Why did I leave my first call? There were a number of reasons. In short, it was because my wife could not adjust to the culture shock of moving from ____ to _____, and, to make matters worse, I was too overwhelmed with two congregations to be much of a husband or father to my family.”

“No way would I become a pastor like my dad. The hassle my dad puts up with, the long hours and weekend responsibilities are not my cup of tea.”

Colleagues

“I reached out to my fellow pastors for encouragement, only to be lectured at instead of listened to - and, as it happened, to be stabbed in the back by one of the ‘brethren.’”

“The thing that affected me and my stress problems is that I had no confidant.”

“Walking together has become a contract to lock step, with a fear factor of people looking over my shoulder, not in a collegial and uplifting way, but in a judging and doctrinaire way.”

“Talking with fellow pastors doesn’t help either. In a position in which eternal optimism is the order of the day, because it is ‘the Lord’s work,’ there is little room for speaking of frustrations and realities. What you do get are many platitudes, jokes and Biblical references which are not immediately helpful.”

“I have attended meetings where, if words could kill, I would have been slain over and over again.”

Finances

“Why is it that when a pastor speaks to his congregation or elders about salary, we are seen as being money hungry? I have 20 years experience coupled with eight years of education. Yet, at the local public school, my children get free lunches. This means we are toward the bottom of the economic ladder.”

“If every district in this Synod is going to publish salary guidelines (and they all do), then there should be some kind of leverage in making sure that a congregation makes an honest attempt to live up to them. It is patently obvious that no LCMS pastor is going to get rich in any congregation. But, it is also painfully obvious that the first way people vote negatively in a church is through their pocketbook.”

Congregation

“For pastors, I believe the reason for leaving the ministry is both realistic expectations and finances.”

“Church work is stressful and hard. A partial solution is to share it with others. Help would come by recognizing others as leadership colleagues.”

“There is a growing hire-and-fire mentality within congregations toward ‘called workers.’ Congregations that are unhappy with their pastors ask or pressure him to leave. This would not have happened 20 years ago.”

“I have yet to hear many openly discuss one very difficult and sad point. In large part today, many of our congregations have lost respect for the Office of the Holy Ministry. The attitudes of some congregational members are much less tolerant when they disagree with their pastors. This results in a lot of impatience on the part of both pastor and people, and, unfortunately, at times results in an ‘us-versus-them’ attitude.”

“They would not listen to a young pastor try to explain his position from the Scriptures and confessions of the church. Instead, they wrote letters to the district president. But, in those letters, they did not bring up the real issues. They complained about petty things. Life became unbearable.”

Personality

“So what were the reasons for my almost leaving the ministry?”

“First, it was my own emotional immaturity. I am a person who wants to be liked. I am a person who likes to avoid controversy. I am a person who sees trouble when I should trust that the Lord will see us through.”

“Second, it was my emotional turmoil.”

“Our seminaries do an excellent job of giving us academic tools and a very rational approach to God. There needs to be a balance of head and heart. No one spoke of ‘spiritual disciplines’ or the need for a ‘spiritual director.’”

Where do we go from here?

I am deeply grateful to those who wrote. Could we in the church use this information to begin their own “conversations”? We need to make headway against some of the most virulent of these concerns. Can we find constructive and helpful ways to address the concerns?

KEEPING CHURCH WORKERS: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Why are church workers, especially teachers and pastors, leaving their vocations (due to choice, retirement, death, disability and removal) at a rate that is faster than others are replacing them? My *Pressure Points* column raised that question in April and May, and asked for readers' comments. Summaries of their replies were printed in the June REPORTER, as was a follow-up question: "Where do we go from here?"

The responses are in the words of those who wrote. In order for a response to be considered for publication, at least two people had to provide similar responses. In most instances, the quotes reflect a much larger response.

As one pastor said, "It is easy to complain, but it is another thing to offer constructive help. It is because I want things to go well in the church that I write. I am tired of hearing the laments of pastors and their families. And, I am tired of complaining myself. If only a few things could get straightened out."

I hope this article is one step toward doing that. It is, of course, only a step. But, if issues are out in the open, and some possible solutions are presented, aren't we impelled to walk forward?

Reader's thoughts:

General comments

"I just thought of a method to address the concerns of your article: service. I believe that if service to fellow human beings became the guiding theme of the LCMS, things would change."

"We might start loving one another, now."

"I'm surprised, and a bit disappointed, that nobody thus far has started with the basics of the Catechism. Have we forgotten the Table of Duties? (See 1943 edition, pages 25-30; 1986 edition, pages 33-38)"

Approaches

"I do not know that we should do much nail biting over what is happening to our pastors. The Lord is quite clear. It is His harvest, not ours. We are to pray for Him to literally 'throw out' (don't you just love the irony of that Greek word?) workers into the harvest. Perhaps the famine for the Word of God that Amos spoke of is on its way."

"What if it is the Lord's will that we have fewer preachers and teachers? Perhaps the question is not, 'Why are we having trouble recruiting and holding men in the ministry?' but 'What are we to learn from this?' What if this shortage of pastors drives the laity to take hold of the needs of the church and the unchurched? Wouldn't that be a good thing? What if it drives people past 'religious opinions' to a real knowledge of Scripture, just because there is no resident 'expert'?" (From a pastor.)

“I don’t know about teachers, but most pastors have very little idea as to how to go about involving lay people meaningfully in ministry. We tend, either because we’ve been taught or because we don’t know how to do it any other way, to take on most of the ‘important’ tasks of ministry on our own. Seminaries must recognize the need to train the pastor to be a facilitator and discipler of the laity. Doing so multiplies the ministry and divides the burden.”

“God has a plan for us in the secular world. During my years in the public school system, I was able to make a significant difference in the lives of children, staff and families. Each day, as I drove to school, it was my personal prayer that God would empower me to be a positive Christian leader.”

“It would be very helpful, I think, to include in the conversation some comments that are constructive and positive. [How about]...an article entitled, ‘How to Keep and Support Church Staff,’ a positive counterpart to the published complaints in which pastors and teachers tell about good working relationships and how issues were resolved constructively.”

Compensation

“During a vacancy, the congregation is sometimes more willing to delve into some of these problems because they are eager for their own undershepherd and may be willing to do what it takes to address some key issues.”

“I can assure you that, if a congregation is looking for a pastor or teacher and Synod objects, saying, ‘The salary is inadequate, therefore no call can be sent,’ mountains can be moved. Synod may object by saying that they are advisory only, but they also exist to protect the pastor and teacher.”

“It is my understanding that the Lutheran Church of Australia has a set salary schedule for all pastors, taking in all the circumstances of education, time of service, needs of family, etc. They also require, as I understand it, that congregations send their funds to a central treasurer of the church body. The pastors, in turn, are paid from that central treasury. This removes the threat of any one person or small group of recalcitrants of a congregation to control the clergy by refusing to support the pastor’s financial needs.”

“The salaries (of workers of some other denominations) are determined by the judicatories. It’s disappointing that the district doesn’t examine church budgets annually and, when necessary, tell congregations, ‘Hey! You’re out of line here!’”

“We congregations need to rise to the occasion and compensate our shepherds on a scale commensurate with their peers in the private sector. It is demeaning not to do so. Synod salary guidelines should be the norm.”

“I want our congregation to go on record as paying at least 110 percent of the district salary guidelines to our teachers and our pastor.”

“The unending question of why we have so many vacant pulpits is probably no different than from any other profession suffering the same predicament. That is, the given position is not considered an attractive possibility because the ‘compensation’ is not commensurate with the level of preparation to obtain such a position, nor to keep it once there. This ‘compensation’ is the *overall support* that the Synod, district and, most importantly...the calling congregation gives [to] the office holder. This support is measured by one, or any combination of: salary, vacation time, health and retirement packages, or even support of one’s ministry in the congregation, including the emotional support for one’s personal and family obligations and priorities.”

“I assumed my first pastorate in the ’60s. Shortly thereafter, the circuit counselor came to a voters meeting of my congregation. He told me to stay home because he was going to ascertain whether the congregation was meeting my needs (and that of my family).”

“When it comes to money, consider what the Concordia Plans do for us. Every quarter our congregations, through their treasurers, really have to make an effort. How many members of our congregations have it that good.”

“Since many congregations cannot afford (or do not want) to pay pastors/teachers/DCEs adequately, how about offering what the congregations can afford - time. I would suggest districts think about starting at four weeks, and perhaps requiring (or strongly suggesting) that one of those weeks be spent in a spiritual refreshment type activity. And, church workers should take a minimum of one day off per week.”

Climate

“Circuit meetings regularly included times when a brother pastor could unburden his heart - on either a personal or pastoral matter. Our circuit counselor reminded us that these matters were private and carried the seal of the confessional. Older pastors set an example as they brought their concerns before us, thus encouraging the younger brothers to imitate them. I remember with great fondness how we prayed for and supported one another in all of the dilemmas and issues of life and ministry.”

“We are so hesitant to risk the pain and disappointments of ministry. It certainly indicates a real lack of sharing trust. Perhaps your articles may encourage more sharing.”

“Are we all to live in fear that, if we simply discuss theological issues and explore our disagreements with Synod, we stand the chance of being purged?”

“It is unfortunate - no, sinful - to see the politics within our Synod. Perhaps that might be the first place to clean our house. How that might be accomplished is an internal matter for which no layman has an answer. Circuit counselors should be the first line of defense for resolving doctrinal and personal differences that have become quite evident of late.”

Resources

“Since I turned this ministry over to God about six years ago and prayed that He would guide and direct my life by His Holy Spirit, I’ve never been so wrecked in the ministry so many times. I know, however, that God does provide me with strength and wisdom in His own time and place. I look at this as a growing experience with always more to learn and trust in. I think pastors get frustrated easily when they go out into the field thinking they know it all and they are the tower from which all Biblical/spiritual wisdom comes.”

“Each pastor/teacher needs a clear job description that not only describes the job, but also [says] what realistic outcomes are expected. Such a job description provides an adequate basis for evaluating the work that is to be done. This can protect: a) the congregation against lazy and incompetent workers, b) the pastor/teacher against inconsequential and judgmental attitudes toward his/her work, c) the pastor/teacher from inordinate expectations of time-consuming work.”

“I believe that Synod could encourage support groups, and those who are psychologically gifted could provide guidelines for these groups so that spiritual and emotional growth for personal and pastoral living and working can be effected.”

“Synod needs to create a support system for those currently serving in the teaching ministry. Workers need to be reassured that they are not alone and that the issues and conflicts confronting them are experienced by others. Congregations need to assess their role expectations of teachers, accept personality differences, develop tolerance, adjust to change and appreciate their called workers as servants sent from God as a blessing to them.”

“I would like to see a pilot program begun, with a pastor completely removed from the district office. This man would visit each pastor, and perhaps teachers, in the district. Each conversation would be in the strictest of confidence. The worker could say anything he wanted. Only if the worker wanted the visitor to tell the district president something would the DP know anything about it. It is so much easier when you can share problems or joys with a confidant, getting these things out. I feel we must do everything we can to conserve and serve our present workers.”

“We have many retired pastors, well respected, very much involved with church work and ministry, who would be very good at being a visitor for the pastor. I visualize this position as one not responsible to any official. I have long looked for this sort of person.”

Recruitment

“An LCMS commission or board of recruitment needs to be created and empowered to develop a strategy for recruitment of future Lutheran teachers. Recruitment of prospective Lutheran teachers among Lutheran youth, especially in Lutheran high schools, and into the Concordia system must be improved. It must be the joint responsibility of the local church or congregation and the church-at-large. We must break the perception of poverty for LCMS teachers which now appears to be well known and well

established among Lutheran youth considering careers. There is, in fact, a synodical campaign to increase the number of church workers over the next decade. There is, and has been, specific recruitment to the seminaries in Fort Wayne and St. Louis, and to the other 10 Concordia campuses, as well. But, these efforts must be broadened, deepened and made permanent, and thus remains the need for a Commission for the Recruitment of Church Workers.”

Baseline

“Where do we go from here?’ To the cross! To help congregation members and church professionals see each other as accepted, loved, forgiven members of the Body of Christ; and then listen, talk and pray together to discover, develop and deploy the best of the gifts and skills that God has given to bring His hope and help to the community.”

May the discussion begun here continue at all levels. I pledge to do as one pastor suggested: “Keep asking questions; keep supporting clergy and talking about issues that they can’t seem to discuss among themselves. We clergy are good at griping, but seem slow to approach issues in an analytical way so as to broaden the discussion in the church, so as to think about remedies or solutions.” This is true for all church workers, of course.

I am deeply moved by the heartfelt words of those who have written or talked with me in connection with these important concerns.

PRESSURE POINTS ARTICLE OCTOBER 1999

Q: Throughout this “conversation” about people leaving or staying in ministry, we’ve heard from a number of people who have many good ideas. But have you lost your voice? What impresses you about what you have read?

A: Here are three areas for thought. They are stimulated by our readers’ heartfelt responses to this column; but, now, this is my voice:

The climate of “justified” expression of disaffection and anger in our church body (and our culture) must be addressed responsibly by all of us, but especially by our leadership at all levels. There is little difference between road rage and voters-assembly harangue, for instance. And, there is little difference between spiteful talk-radio and television, and clergy beating up on each other.

There will always be disagreements and conflicts. It is how the conflicts are managed that is a problem. The yearning of our workers for respectful and supportive relationships with others in the Body of Christ is significant. If behavior between people in the church mirrors problematic behavior in other organizations, then what gain is there, and what witness is given? Besides, such behavior causes diseases in people.

We must establish amongst ourselves canons of acceptable behavior. We should not accept destructive behavior in our midst, regardless of in whose name or in what cause it is perpetrated. We need to set a tone that says: gossip is wrong, assaultive and disrespectful words are sinful and injurious, direct discussions with people with whom we disagree is right, and that we will not act on rumor. We need to dismiss and repudiate our own versions of Jerry Springer. We need to set a tone of safe, yet accountable, relationships with each other. Wouldn’t it be good to have a special synodical emphasis on positive, supportive, health-giving, life-affirming ways to interact with each other?

In general, compensation, especially for our teachers, seems abysmal. If we continue to keep open some of our churches and schools on the backs of the salaries of our workers, no wonder they leave! In such cases, leaving would likely be healthy.

The LCMS is in the midst of a major research project that will give us accurate data on compensation questions. The results of that research project should be shared immediately. Perhaps we are overreacting, and church workers are better compensated than we believe. But, let’s see. And, when we see, we can covenant to do something about it.

Everyone should be paid a living wage! I am sure that there will be much dialogue about this as the years go on, but it is abusive to people to manipulatively use the mission of the church to support low compensation.

And, most of all, we can pray that the Holy Spirit will open each of our hearts to be shattered by the Law and healed by the Gospel. This means that we are brutally honest about our own attitudes and behavior, and regularly flee to the cross of Jesus Christ - where we find true release from all of our bondages.

PRESSURE POINTS NOVEMBER 1999

This column picks up where last month's column ended and continues to express my concerns and ideas about supporting our church workers so that more of them can joyfully and competently remain in their vocations.

I have received hundreds of responses to the questions this column previously raised, both about the forces that encourage church workers to leave their vocations, and about the support systems that might help us slow their exodus. My thoughts in the last column and this one are based on what I have heard. And, they are what I believe to be true.

Retaining workers should be as important a priority for The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod and its schools, parishes and agencies as is the preparation of those same workers. If we in the Synod spend thousands of dollars and years of time to "prepare" a pastor, for instance, but offer little in the way of support for his work, then we are squandering our preparation and, frankly, not being good stewards of the resources (people's time and money) granted to us. If we gear up a recruitment campaign without attending equally to those influences that cause overwhelming distress and loss of vocation, what have we gained? Our workers are coming in the front door and going out the back door.

Congregations ought to more fully support the schools and seminaries that equip our teachers and pastors; and, they ought to be providing continuing-education opportunities in which supportive members of the parish ask how ministry is going. Every congregation could and should have a group whose sole task is to provide support, encouragement and vocational reflection with church workers. Our colleagues in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have such emphases. In short, congregations should make it a priority to work with their church workers on the issue of vocational satisfaction.

The Synod, as well, should invest much, much more in "retaining" its church workers! We should pay attention to our behavior patterns to see how well we, at the national and district levels, either support our workers or add to their distress. If we did so, we would not place workers in situations where we know that problems are unresolved and that workers will get "chewed up," or where salaries are grossly inadequate. And, if we did, we would not investigate and criticize nearly as much as we would empower and encourage.

As a church body, we need to get out of denial about these concerns. We have a problem. There are no "ifs, ands or buts" about it. Let us leave our denials - even if they have pious-sounding language - and admit it! We are in the midst of a church-worker crisis of significant proportions. Increasingly, our problems seem not to be programmatic finances, but rather of finding personnel to do the work. Let's have our synodical leadership call a conference of people who have left ministry to hear their stories; for there we can find direction for our work in this area.

We also need to understand that we are in the midst of a profound spiritual crisis. Like many organizations, we seem to be responding to our church-worker crisis as though it can be solved if only we will put together the best of contemporary management and psychological insight. As part of God's creation, such secular insights can be, and often are, useful. But, they are never, ever, the ends of our discernment process.

We are the people of God who can respond to crises with the discernment of the Holy Spirit, fortified by Sacrament and Word. I wonder what would happen if we put a moratorium on everything "corporate" (including bylaws and structure and their revision), and gathered in prayer, forming and reforming our parishes, district and Synod as "organizations" that preach, teach and heal. With people, such things are impossible, of course. But with God...

PRESSURE POINTS JANUARY 2000

Here are two related questions:

Q: At a recent voter's assembly, our elders recommended and our voters approved a reduction in the salary of our pastor. I...know that there has been some friction between the pastor and the church leaders, but this seems to be a very bad way to be handling it...Does it happen very much, or are we the only church doing this?

Q: We just voted our 2000 budget. No increase in salary for our teachers - of which I'm one - nor for our pastor. Nobody talked to us about this. It was just announced that it was to be this way. This isn't right. What can we do about it?

A: Reducing church workers' salaries is wrong! Both voting an actual reduction and voting "no increase" are a loss of salary. Such behavior is ethically flawed where it occurs, but it is even more odious when it occurs in a congregation, the very place where people come together with Sacrament and Word and mobilize to spread the Good News in action and word.

"But," a reader might say, "you do not know the circumstances of each situation. Perhaps the congregation and the school are unable to raise enough money to give increases. Perhaps the school would need to close if increases were given. Perhaps the pastor has not paid close attention to the spiritual care of his flock. Perhaps the congregational leaders believe that the pastor and they are not in agreement about directions for the parish.

Indeed, the specifics of each case should be discussed. Still, dealing with church workers' salaries in this way is wrong. But it does seem to be happening.

What can we learn from these communications? In both cases, it seems that there has been little, if any, conversation about the issues. In the "no increase" situation, the teachers were never brought into the discussion. In the "reduction" letter, the "cut" seems to be a way of dealing with differences between people. In neither case was there any suggestion that there was mutual discussion and planning.

In the Christian community, salary should never be used as a vehicle for pressure or control, and it should not be used to "make a statement" concerning another issue. If we don't get along with our pastor, we should not reduce his salary instead of making a genuine effort to create dialog and foster reconciliation. The church or school should never be kept open on the backs of the workers unless everyone in the congregation is also participating in the financial sacrifices.

What to do about it? Repentance is always the place to begin. Sacrament and Word are always the place for forgiveness and strengthening. Then, honest and truthful communication, direct conversation about issues, and prayerful work together, perhaps with some outside assistance, would be of great potential benefit. Church workers will need to be more vocal about problematic uses of money, and congregational members will need to be more straightforward with their relationship concerns.

PRESSURE POINTS ARTICLE FEBRUARY 2000

Here are portions of two related and articulate responses to previous columns that are representative of a number of communications that have come my way on the theme of the loss of pastors. In these cases, a point is being made for an understanding of the problematic effect of some clerical attitudes and behavior.

COMMENT 1: My observations during my years as a seminary student - and, now, as a parish pastor - lead me to the point where I must speak out. My frustration lies in my perception that what I see and see as a major problem causing clergy loss is not being addressed in any of the articles in REPORTER. This leads me to assume that either no one else is seeing what I'm seeing or that the issue is being raised but is being filtered out for some reason. If our church is ever going to solve the problem of the lack of clergy, it had better start raising the standard of who it sends out. If young people don't respect the pastors that they see coming out of our schools, how in the world are we ever going to encourage them to follow in their steps? I love my church and I take great comfort in the stand that our synod is taking against all of the crazy trends in the religious world; but, please, please don't undermine the work of those with a true pastor's heart by accepting candidates who are nothing but an embarrassment to our beloved church.

COMMENT 2: In your columns of late you have been sounding a good concern for the appropriate and proper care of pastors. You have encouraged congregations to behave in what I suppose you would call "healthy" ways in regard to its workers. You speak words that we leaders in congregations need to hear. But you, and others in the Synod, also need to hear words from us. Some pastors come to our churches and make immediate and troubling changes. They don't bother to find out about us, but just turn things upside down, at times in dictatorial ways. This has happened in several congregations that I personally know of. People are leaving these churches. Please balance your words about this. Advocate for the appropriate and effective selection, review and education of clergy!

A: It is a very good thing that issues concerning the growth and support, and recruitment and retention of our church workers are getting increasing attention. From a mild blip on the recruitment screen to a major (I hope!) church awareness, what is happening with our church workers is getting more "press." With that increasing awareness also comes clearer definitions of the problems and solutions. Before we suggest ways to get healthier, we need to know in what ways we are sick.

Your very articulate and impassioned responses to the ongoing conversation are extremely important voices to be heard - voices that have been less active. What are the perspectives from the point of view of laypeople at the congregational level? And, from clergy who are willing to speak about what they see going on around them in the lives of parishes?

In this ongoing conversation, none of us seeks to demonize or to blame. Rather, we seek to clearly identify some of the issues and concerns that vex us. One issue which you both identify is clergy ill-fitted to their vocation. We in the Synod ought to be able to help with that through our discernment processes. After all, all "calls" are not from the Holy Spirit.

But, I also think we could help a lot by encouraging (requiring?) two things in our churchworker education process: ongoing conversation with a pastor (not faculty) concerning the student's inner spiritual life, and opportunities to work together with other students to build teamwork and collegiality.

KOBER TO COP: HELP IMPROVE SYNOD'S 'CULTURE'

By David L. Mahsman

A "culture" marked by mistrust, pain, bitterness, a lack of forgiveness and, often, sinful treatment of one another has developed in the Missouri Synod over the past 25 years, says the trainer of the Synod's "reconcilers."

Ted Kober, who for two years has been training reconcilers for the Synod's dispute-resolution process, spent an hour with the Council of Presidents (COP) Nov. 19 to outline his concerns and offer recommendations. The council met here Nov. 17-19, "piggybacking" on the Fall Leadership Conference that began Nov. 19.

"I challenge you to help lead our Synod in a season of repentance," Kober told the COP - the Synod's president, vice presidents and district presidents. He said he hoped his report would encourage discussion "that will lead us all to finding ways to improve the culture of our Synod and the witness of our church for the sake of the Gospel."

Kober is a member of the Synod's Board of Directors. He is also director of leadership training for Peacemaker Ministries of Billings, Mont., a non-profit organization whose stated mission is "equipping and assisting Christians to respond to conflict Biblically." In addition to training LCMS reconcilers, he led 1999 "peacemaker training" for the Synod's circuit counselors, training that was encouraged by the COP.

When he began training reconcilers and circuit counselors, Kober said, he did not intend to study the Synod and its culture. But his experience, especially working with circuit counselors, led to his conclusions, he said.

He reported that pastors sought him out during breaks and meals at training events "and shared their weaknesses, fears, concerns." He said there are "deep hurts and pains about how we treat one another."

Kober said that the Missouri Synod is blessed with many strengths, including gifted leaders throughout the Synod, substantial unity in solidly Biblical doctrine, and worldwide leadership in mission work, education and training in peacemaking. But, he said, the Synod is marked by some characteristics that make its work less effective and productive than it could be.

He outlined five concerns:

Significant evidence of much unresolved hurt, pain, bitterness and "unforgiveness" among pastors, other church workers and lay leaders.

Failure "to recognize the sinfulness of some of the practices in our culture." Kober cited as examples labeling one another; publishing accusations against one another without first talking directly to the person involved; leaders acting against those they supervise on the basis of second-and-third-hand information without permitting the accused an opportunity to reply; and Internet "chat rooms" where some church workers gossip about and slander others.

"A significant feeling of mistrust and suspicion among many of our pastors."

A tendency to present doctrinal differences as the most serious issue in the Synod. Kober said he believes that “underlying sin issues” - how those in the Synod treat one another - affect synodical unity far more than any alleged doctrinal differences.

Although admired for its confessional stance, the Missouri Synod has a reputation for sometimes “not putting its faith into practice, especially in how we relate to one another.”

“We have developed a culture in how we treat one another that reflects more of the world’s ways than the way of Christ’s church,” Kober told the Council of Presidents. He said protecting pure doctrine has sometimes become “an end to justify sinful means, especially violating God’s command to love one another as He loved us.”

Kober said the culture to which he refers seems to have developed over the years since the synodical controversy of the early 1970s that became focused to a large extent on the “walkout” of the faculty majority then at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. “That event and the things that happened to our church body since have affected us in ways we cannot begin to appreciate,” he said - even though most of those now affected were not involved in the controversies of that time.

“We’re passing it on to the next generation,” he added. “The doctrinal problem is not the issue, but the way we have treated one another since that event took place.”

Citing 2 Peter 1:3-9, Kober said that when we fail to exhibit godly characteristics such as kindness and brotherly love, we act like a people who “have forgotten that our sins are forgiven.” He said, “We are too embarrassed to confess, too righteous to forgive.”

Kober offered these recommendations:

“Healing will not come about in our Synod until we deal with our pains and hurts through confession and forgiveness,” he said. In addition to confessing to God, he said, leaders need to confess privately to those they have offended and pray for those with whom they are in unresolved conflict; confess publicly to those they lead; and help lead districts and the Synod to confess sins corporately to God. “Of course, with the confession, there needs to be the reassurance of the forgiveness of our God because of our Savior Jesus Christ,” he said.

Teach peacemaking. “Teach our people to change our culture by making confession and forgiveness a way of life instead of reserving it for the Divine Service on Sunday,” Kober said.

Model Biblical peacemaking. He encouraged the COP to “demonstrate putting faith into practice.”

“Is it really possible to change our Synod and its culture?” Kober asked. He told council members that his hope is not in them, in others or in training, but in Christ. He said that the key is to “keep our focus on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith.”

COP members offered their comments following Kober’s presentation. Many expressed appreciation for his observations.

“God forbid we adjourn...and this is the last time we think or talk about it together,” said President C. William Hoesman of the Michigan District. “I would like to think that we can do something corporately.”

The COP invited Kober to return to its April meeting.

Kober told the REPORTER that he intends to present his observations in other forums, as well. Representatives of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and some LCMS universities, as well as other district and Synod leaders, have invited him to share his observations, he said.

“If we can honestly examine our sinful habits, we can be reminded of the forgiveness that is our in Christ, as we are told in 1 John 1:8 and 9,” Kober said. “The good news of the Gospel will give us the power to overcome our sinful patterns and change the culture of our Synod.”

HOW PEOPLE TREAT OTHERS KEY TO RETAINING PASTORS, RECRUITMENT, REPORT SAYS

By Joe Isenhower, Jr.

How people treat each other is a major factor in the growing shortage of Missouri Synod pastors, according to findings of a just-released study.

The “Clergy Shortage Study,” commissioned by the Board for Higher Education (BHE), was conducted by Dr. Alan C. Klaas and Cheryl D. Klaas of Mission Growth Ministries, Smithville, MO.

A report of the study gives results of interview last year with a cross section of pastors, former pastors, seminarians and wives of those three groups; Concordia University System and Lutheran high school students (including pastors’ children); seminary faculty and staff; all 35 district presidents; pastoral human-care givers; and officials of nine other denominations.

It points to several trends:

*estimates that a fifth of all parish pastors in the Synod are in “advanced stages” of burnout, with a similar number well on their way to it;

*a “harshness” and “intolerant spirit” among many Synod congregations and pastors that “is poisoning the infrastructure of the LCMS”;

*increasing psychological problems in pastors’ and seminarians’ families, and minimal resources in the church to deal with those problems; and

*parents discouraging their sons from entering the parish ministry

At the same time, it estimates that about 30 percent of current parish pastors “truly love their work and eagerly approach each day,” and that approximately another 30 percent are “ambivalent about their ministry.”

A “background” section at the beginning of the report gives the following information from four Synod groups:

*The BHE determined that during 1988-1997 there was a net loss of 1,305 clergy in the Synod.

*The LCMS Council of Presidents found in 1997 that 15 percent of congregations were vacant and calling a pastor, up 7 percent from 10 years earlier.

*The Department of Planning and Research discovered that the number of pastors reaching normal retirement age will increase in the next 20 years.

*North America Missions announced plans to increase the number of U.S. mission stations from 6,200 to 7,000 within a decade.

If the downward trend in the number of clergy continues as it did during the 1988-1997 period, the study suggests, there could be only 2,220 parish pastors in the Synod (compared with the 5,187 reported for the end of 1998) by 2017.

“The Clergy Shortage Study was launched to understand what is going [on] in the hearts and minds of the key people involved,” the report of the study says.

“We set out to study recruitment and retention, and it turned out that how people treat each other is 60 to 70 percent of the problem,” said Alan Klaas. “So that means that recruiting is only about 30 percent of the problem.”

“We found that recruiting is about relationships, not mechanics,” said Klaas, “and that the best recruiters of future pastors are local pastors. But we also discovered that depressed, burned-out pastors are not effective role models for recruiting future pastors.”

The study boils down its findings to 20 problems and their possible solutions.

“More important than the stated possible solutions is the need for widespread discussion within all parts of the church about the central issues uncovered,” says an introductory letter to the report from the study’s six-member steering committee. That committee was appointed by the BHE.

“This study touches the heart of the question of why more young men are not choosing to prepare for pastoral ministry,” said Dr. William F. Meyer, executive director of the BHE. “It certainly tells us where our recruitment efforts are effective or need modification. And it is sad to learn that many of the role models are struggling as pastors. The church at large needs to address this issue with serious intent and resolve.”

Earlier this month, copies of the “Clergy Shortage Study” report were sent to the members of the Synod’s Board of Directors, BHE and Council of Presidents, and to college and seminary presidents. As this REPORTER went to press, the BHE was beginning a meeting in Bronxville, N.Y., during which it was expected to discuss the report, including making it available to others.

The study was conducted using “statistically small samples [of randomly chosen people] in order to be able to contact the wide variety of persons necessary to understand the issues,” according to the report. It says those are the same principles that allow polling organizations to accurately predict election results from a small sampling of people.

Funding for the study came from Aid Association for Lutherans and Lutheran Brotherhood.

CLERGY-SHORTAGE REPORT OFFERS PROBLEMS, SOLUTIONS

The “Clergy Shortage Study” prepared for the Board for Higher Education offers 20 problems and their possible solutions.

Of those, 11 relate to retention of parish pastors and eight to recruitment of future pastors. As stated in the study, the 20th is actually a suggestion for “observations on a different way of viewing the overall question of providing ministerial support to congregations.”

The research presents these problems and possible solutions as discussion starters throughout the Synod.

Following are brief summaries of each.

Retention

Problem 1 - People “beating” on each other over differences of opinion - verbally and emotionally - including pastors on pastors, pastors on parishioners, parishioners on pastors, and parishioners on each other.

Solutions - Confess, seek repentance, and stop this sinful behavior. Ask all at circuit pastor meetings to sign a covenant that they will not speak ill of each other and will admonish those who do. Ask church councils and their pastor(s) to sign a similar covenant.

Problem 2 - Mismatching of pastors and congregations, which is the most frequent reason pastors leave the ministry.

Solutions - Outreach-minded pastors and internally focused congregations should avoid each other, as should maintenance-minded pastors and externally focused congregations. Be clear about key questions that often divide congregations from their pastors, such as communion and worship practices. Be sure the entire congregation is together on such key questions, especially before calling a pastor.

Problem 3 - Getting help to pastors, especially those in advanced stages of career and personal burnout.

Solutions - Provide free counseling for pastors and families. Caring fellow pastors need to encourage other pastors in distress to seek help. Study for possible adoption two programs of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod that help its pastors.

Problem 4 - Support for wives and children.

Solutions - Form congregation-level support groups. Parishioners should grant the pastor’s family the same level of privacy they demand for themselves. Provide free counseling and therapy not connected to the district administrative structure.

Problem 5 - Clergy income. (While pastors in the study said this was not a big issue, the topic came up often.)

Solutions - Establish as a requirement that congregations pay salary and housing at a rate at least 50 percent above the government-established poverty level before they receive a call list for a full-time pastor. Ask congregations to “pay so our pastor can live like we live.” Provide debt-assistance programs that pay off church-worker debt, based on years of service.

Problem 6 - Grossly unreasonable expectations of pastor.

Solutions - Pastors should give up 30 percent of what they handle in their “in” baskets and forsake their tendencies for perfectionism. Congregations need to develop a more realistic understanding of the pastor’s time. These solutions point to the need for laity to move into appropriate ministries where they can use their talents.

Problem 7 - Fighting and sick congregations.

Solutions - District presidents should decline to send a call list to congregations that force several pastors to leave within a set number of years. Develop interim-ministry professionals to serve troubled congregations while helping them out of the problems. Match pastors who cannot seem to stay in a congregation for more than a few years with congregations that cannot manage to keep a pastor for any longer than that.

Problem 8 - Congregations where a few members dominate the vast majority.

Solutions - Provide congregational training in techniques to deal with strong-willed individuals unwilling to conform to the wishes of the majority. District officials should deal with the issues rather than sending in pastor after pastor.

Future retention (situations involving current seminarians that will probably lead to eventual retention problems)

Problem 9 - Seminarian spouse and family problems that exist at both seminaries. (For instance, this and another study finds that about half the students’ wives at both seminaries do not want to be “in the seminary.”)

Solutions - Provide free counseling and therapy with no required qualifications and no record passed to the seminary. Generally, do not accept students for admission if the family has children in high school, since the experience can be extremely traumatic for the children and their families.

Problem 10 - Men entering the ministry with the intent to “fix” congregations.

Solutions - Seminaries need to address the issue in the admissions process and during the educational experience.

Problem 11 - Men entering the ministry when all other options dry up.

Solutions - Perhaps apply a deeper level of admission screening, possibly with the kind of clinical psychological screening often used by businesses. First placement of such graduates is probably best in stable, well-behaved, and relatively small congregations.

Recruiting

Problem 12 - Depressed, burned out clergy don't make good recruiters.

Solutions - Help these pastors in ways mentioned in solutions to Problem 3. Pastors with burnout should be very careful about recruiting.

Problem 13 - Parents degrading their pastor.

Solutions - Parents simply have to stop running down their pastors, especially in front of their children. Where pastors are engaging in negative behavior toward each other or parishioners, they could help put a stop to this by engaging solutions in Problem 1.

Problem 14 - Pastoring is mostly invisible (for instance, when youth see the pastor only during worship).

Solutions - Employ "shadowing," a concept where one accompanies a person already functioning in the career being considered. For instance, the pastor engages youth in assisting him with pastoral duties besides worship, or at worship in such duties as acolyte or greeting worshipers. Pastors of larger congregations could hire a young person with ministry potential to assist with tasks at home, to give experience with a healthy person in ministry.

Problem 15 - Recruiting is about relationships.

Solutions - Remember that building interest in considering parish ministry is a long-term process. Seminary recruiters need to remember that building relationships is just as important for them. Districts can operate programs to identify and recruit potential church workers.

Problem 16 - Post-education debt.

Solutions - Districts and congregations can help their church workers with debt repayment relief over a period of years.

Problem 17 - Parents reluctant to encourage children into clergy.

Solutions - This is closely related to solutions for retention problems. As the life of the pastor is made more humane and peace comes to more congregations, parents will be more supportive of encouraging children toward pastoral ministry.

Problem 18 - Children of clergy not entering ministry.

Solutions - (same as 17)

Problem 19 - Mechanics of recruiting.

Solutions - Prepare all recruiting materials, such as brochures and referral systems, with a polished, professional look. Pastors need to take time to establish personal relationships with young people in their congregations.

Problems 20 - Even if seminary enrollments doubled and dropout rates were cut in half, the Synod would still have more than 1,000 ministry locations without a pastor.

Solutions - Consider using licensed deacons. Virtually all of organized Christendom is embracing the concept of licensed deacons, who conduct ministry under supervision of a local pastor. They are trained in a judicatory-operated program for a specific ministry location, for as long as they are at that location. This trend includes denominations with theological traditions similar to the Missouri Synod. Conduct a formal study of the difference between advanced theological-degreed education and a call from God to ministry to a group of believers. Develop creative solutions to problems of providing parish leadership training.